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ABSTRACT

A discriminatory process that sorts individuals on the basis of their estimated value or worth reaches into every aspect of individual life today. This process is referred to as the panoptic sort, the all-seeing eye of the difference machine that guides the global capitalist system. The panoptic sort is a kind of high-tech, cybernetic triage that sorts people according to their presumed economic or political value. This book, as a project in critical theory, provides a critical assessment of the character and consequences of the development and implementation of the panoptic sort. As the panoptic sort operates to increase the precision with which individuals are classified according to their perceived value in the marketplace and their susceptibility to various appeals, the commoditization of information increases the dependence of these interests on subsidized information. The origins of the panoptic sort and its integrated functions of identification, classification, and assessment are explored, with particular attention to issues of privacy and data protection. Fifteen tables and 14 figures illustrate the discussion. (SLD)

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